The productivity challenge in Australia: The case for professional renewal in VET teaching

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Abstract

This paper was prompted by the call for submissions to the Rudd government's 2020 Summit in April 2008. It analyses the impacts of VET reform on the VET workforce in order to identify strategies that might inform an agenda to build the workforce capacity to support economic and innovation. The paper argues that VET reforms since the 1990s created disturbances and uncertainties in VET teachers' and managers' work, and working lives. In particular, these reforms failed to recognise and endorse teaching expertise that sits at the heart of VET practice. Top-down reforms and funding constraints, coupled with lack of recognition of VET occupational expertise, created perverse behaviours. These contradictory trends prompted occupational boundary work that drove innovations in the character and reach of VET teaching, yet without establishing the terms and conditions necessary to sustain such occupational expertise. Consequently these innovations continue to be vulnerable because new initiatives-identities cannot compete with established identities in the competition for recognition and resources. These trends run counter to government efforts aimed at engineering change in VET to support skill building in an innovative Australia. This model of reform is not followed by other countries, which recognise and deploy teaching expertise in productive ways to build capacities for innovation amongst young and older worker-citizens. The paper concludes by suggesting that VET teaching expertise is an unacknowledged resource in the productivity challenge that could be mobilised in sustainable ways through professional renewal.

In early 2008, the newly elected Rudd Labor Commonwealth government announced that a Summit was to be held, where 1000 of the 'best and brightest' in Australia would meet over a weekend to tackle 'challenges which require long-term responses from the nation beyond the usual three year electoral cycle'. The aim was to harness expertise across the community to help shape a long-term strategy for Australia's future. Ten critical issues were identified in order to focus contributions and discussion. Education and training was targeted specifically as 'The Productivity Agenda – education, skills, training, science and innovation' (Australia 2020, 2008).

My aim in writing this paper was to speak into this activity by examining the relationship between productivity and occupational expertise in education and training (Seddon, 2008a). Building on my research and professional engagement with VET since the early 1990s, I argued that Australia's future as an innovative knowledge economy is at risk. Organisational authority and control in VET has denied occupational authority and expertise. The renewal of occupational expertise has been hollowed out by the failure to recognise the 'teaching' expertise required to build capacities for innovation.

The case is developed through four steps. First, I elaborate my contention that the erosion of workforce capacity in VET is compromising Australia's innovation capacity. Next, I explain why, conceptually, there is a relationship between Australia's productivity and innovation capacity and education and training workforce capacity. Then I elaborate the empirical data that supports this way of seeing the problem. Finally, I comment on Australia's situation relative to trends in other countries. I conclude by suggesting ways in which Australia could address this productivity problem.

The productivity challenge and the VET workforce

The Productivity topic identified for the 2020 Summit indicated that economic development was linked to human capital formation. This framing drew attention to the importance of high-skilled work for Australia's future; the quality of teaching in formal education and training institutions to prepare Australians for work, life and citizenship; and the processes of knowledge transfer and innovation within Australian workplaces.

Yet the challenge of enhancing productivity is not just a 'here and now' issue. Rather it is anchored in the traditions, relationships, and cultures of Australian education. The significance productivity is itself linked to changes in the world economy and the way countries, companies and communities are now interconnected in multi-scalar global-local ways. These effects have driven competitive pressures as global markets, coupled with increased flows of capital, commodities, information and labour, have been endorsed and supported by market-friendly policy settings.

These processes of change have driven education and training reform since the 1980s. The emergence of VET, vocational education and training, was itself an outcome of revised policy settings. This policy construction created a national training market by reconfiguring the institutional arrangements of technical and further education, organised through state-based TAFE systems, and the more dispersed adult and community education (ACE) sector.

The VET training market reorganised post-school education and training. It sat alongside universities and was focused particularly on work-related adult learning. This orientation reflected decision-making structures that governed VET, which accorded industry a strong voice and more or less excluded the voice of education. In this market, public and private training providers competed for public funding and private industry investments on the basis of their skill-building capacity. These processes, coupled with funding constraints, created imperatives for organisational change within VET providers. It meant that those who lead adult learning had to manage organisational and cultural change in their organizations in ways that cut across established ways of doing adult education and training.

These VET reforms encouraged many innovations, particularly in teaching practices. They all moved well beyond what was sometimes called 'locked in' education and training practices. They were alert to policy imperatives, built collaborative networks within and beyond VET and, through this work, supported innovative capacity-building that supported Australian industry and communities. Through these activities, the VET workforce built up its own capacities for learning, researching and teaching.

Yet each of these innovations were vulnerable to policy whim, short-term resource constraints, changes in personnel and inter- and intra-occupational competition and conflicts. Such boundary work set the limits to what was possible by defining insiders and outsiders according to their proximity and compliance with the reformed structures of power. These processes that regulated resource distributions determined the life source and, hence, sustainability of such innovations and the identities that make them.

It seems that significant information asymmetries exist between policy and practice (McDonald, 1999). On the one hand, governments drive change through top-down mechanisms that are relayed within organizations through managerial processes. On the other, the innovations that have occurred as a result of these reforms do not seem to be recognized or resourced in ways that would ensure their sustainability. This disconnection between policy and practice is unproductive. Weak feedback loops means that knowledge does not cumulate across the VET sector and policy settings are not optimized to support provision and, hence, Australia.

Australia needs a better balance of organisational-occupational power. It needs to recognise and renew teaching occupational expertise that builds and sustains capacity for innovation. There are many initiatives that could be built on. Surprisingly, there is also considerable goodwill amongst teachers who continue to pursue their vocation, building human capacities as learning worker-citizens, despite difficult working conditions.

Australia also needs to address the information asymmetry that endorses compliance at the expense of a culture of questioning. The human resources needed to support innovation are available. Their deployment to support economic and social innovation depends upon coordination and resource allocations that recognize and support good practice.

Yet the opportunity to address these coordination failures is constrained by the supply of labour. The sustainability of working knowledge in applied adult education depends upon young people entering VET teaching. Resources and recognition may attract young people with good industry expertise into teaching careers. Yet the VET workforce is aging. Retirements, plus inadequate support preparing practitioners to teach in VET, compromises access to 'teaching' expertise necessary to build human capacities that support economic and social innovation. There is little time to redress these imbalances.

My contention:

There is a contradiction at the heart of Australia's economic policy. The rhetoric of innovation is incompatible with current coordination and workforce capacity in vocational education and training:

- Innovation requires a culture of questioning. It is incompatible with our current culture of control.

- Innovation requires capacities for critical thinking, learning and researching, courageous actions and responsible use of power. It is incompatible with the run-down of 'teaching' occupational expertise that enables this capacity-building.

The teaching occupation: linking productivity and learning

It is the job of the teaching workforce to prepare Australians for adult lives. This workforce is responsible for building individuals' capacities for educated performance and, through this work, create an appropriately educated and trained workforce in Australia. This teaching work is achieved through the coordination of roles and responsibilities in a division of labour. Teaching, involving front-line relationships with learners, is supported

by other roles (student support services, administrators, finance officers, managers, organisational leaders). These operational activities are supported and coordinated through governance processes that make decisions about framework issues: funding, rules and regulations, educational and investment priorities.

In Australia, this teaching workforce is further segmented by the organization of education and training into formal sectors: early childhood, primary and secondary school education, vocational education and training, and higher education. It also operates, increasingly, through a dispersed network of learning spaces across workplaces and community settings that operate at different scales (local, national, regional, transnational). In this paper, I am focusing on the VET workforce; the teachers who induct learners into work-related learning and skills in public and private training providers (Technical and Further Education Institutes, community-based providers and private training organizations, which operate as both stand-alone organizations and as elements within firms).

The 'teacher', then, is a generic occupational category that exists in many contexts. This nomenclature is mostly identified with school education, but teachers also do their job under other titles – lecturer, trainer, as instructors and preachers working in companies and communities, human resource developers and personnel managers. The work of 'teaching' prepares people so that their capacities, particularly their capacities for innovation, can sustain Australia as part of a global knowledge economy and as a tolerant and safe society, in a world that is far more globally interconnected than in the past.

The term 'teacher'' defines a complex occupational group whose economic and social contribution is to 'build skills' in (and for) Australia. This term is applied to individuals but, in practice, the work of 'teaching' is a collective capacity that must be designed, coordinated and resourced in ways that make it possible to do the job of skill building. It means that learning outcomes are not just the responsibility of those people that do the front-line relationship work with students but also the responsibility of other contributing agencies – support roles, organisational managers and leaders, employers, governments, those who use and benefit from the educated performance those completing education and training, individual learners, families and communities, firms and industries.

It seems that agencies responsible for governing VET have failed to fully recognise the contribution that the teaching occupation makes to skill building. This coordination problem is manifest in the way policy and investment decisions have resulted in an erosion of workforce capacity in VET. It means that teaching expertise that sustains sophisticated skill-building in Australia is being dispersed, rather than concentrated to maximise its impact, and is not

being renewed, despite the risk that an aging workforce heralds the loss of this important resource in Australian VET (Seddon, 2008b).

The sustainability of VET teaching expertise is at risk. This scenario requires urgent attention if Australia is to avoid loosing a distinctive teaching capacity that supports vocationally-oriented learning in learning cultures that are sensitive to learner's needs and attuned to industry and community priorities. This loss would be significant in terms of productivity. It would also further disadvantage young people who do not go to university; second-chance learners and those from vulnerable groups; and adults who seek work-related learning as new entrants and returnees to the workforce, and as people retraining for job changes.

From 'workforce' to 'occupation'

In recent times, the term 'VET workforce' has been popularised as a way of talking about the collective agency that does the job of teaching in Australian VET. My first argument is that this nomenclature is unsatisfactory. A more accurate way of understanding the job of skill building is through the concept of 'occupation' and the nomenclature that describes teaching as an occupation.

The concept of 'workforce' is derived from statistics and ABS collections. It sees a 'workforce' by counting all the individuals who work within a particular industry. Aggregating individuals in this way does not acknowledge the diversity of roles that these 'units of labour' play in the coordinated action necessary to realise VET learning outcomes. It does not acknowledge the contribution and responsibility of governance and decision-making agencies in setting the terms and conditions for this work, which influence organisational capability in important ways. It also does not recognise the expertise that is necessary to do the work of teaching and its relationships to other expertise required to support, coordinate and govern the core work of VET.

By contrast, the concept of 'occupation' sees this aggregate of individuals who do the work of VET as an agency: a social group and locus for collective action. An occupation is defined by the job people do and the way they make their living. In doing this work they actively deploy their capacities for labour: their competencies, working knowledge and their understandings of their world and work, which are framed by their own moral and political values and judgments.

Understanding occupations

An occupation is an ongoing system of identities and activities. It has a distinct social structure and a culture that grows out of the nature of the job and the way it develops over time. Its patterns of agency are framed by governing decisions

about terms and conditions of work, and also by the responses, reactions and renegotiations of these institutional rules by members of the occupation, working individually and collectively (Abbott, 1988).

There have been significant changes in the character of occupations over time but research shows that there are persistent characteristics, which are anchored in the nature, relationships and processes of social groups. As Abbott argues,

- 'Occupations' create their work and are created by it through collective agency
- Expertise is anchored in occupational identity and culture, its organisation in space, through offices and roles, and its renewal over time
- Expertise underpins license and recognition, and the occupation's claim to mandate within a societal division of labour
- Jurisdiction is negotiated through boundary work relative to wider social (external) forces and inter- and intra-occupational conflict (internal forces)
- Boundary work makes delineations of insiders (I-we) and outsiders (we-others). It constructs inclusions-exclusions.

The VET teaching occupation operates as a distinct skill ecosystem (Buchanan, 2006: 14), a 'cluster of high, intermediate, and low-level competencies in a particular region or industry, which are shaped by interlocking networks of firms, markets and institutions'. This VET teaching skill ecosystem is networked into wider education and training skill-building networks through, for example, the rules, resource allocations and policies determined by Australian governments in consultation with industry, community and education stakeholders. The VET teaching occupation also intersects with diverse communities of practice across Australian industry and regions, firms and families. These intersections with learners are mediated by VET practice that mobilises teaching expertise in supportive capacity-building roles. These applications are responsive to changing skill demands that accompany the diversification of work roles and the development of 'quasi-occupational identities and pride' based loosely defined job families and vocational streams (p.16).

Occupations in flexible capitalism

The history of the last 30 years shows that teaching, like other occupations, has been undergoing significant structural and cultural change. It is important to recognise that these changes are global, not just local, in character and they have

affected most occupations. They have occurred because of large-scale changes in the global economy and the way national governments have responded to pressures for more open markets, reduced regulation and weaker social safety nets (Castells, 1996).

The trend to 'flexible capitalism' (Sennett, 1998) has disturbed established occupational orders and wider social ordering. There is substantial evidence that over this period, the global pattern of advantage and disadvantage has shifted to favour the rich and already advantaged, at the expense of those who were already disadvantaged. Harvey (2005: 19) cites the UN's *Human Development Report* for 1999 which states that 'the income gap between the fifth of the world's people living in the richest countries and the fifth in the poorest was 74 to 1 in 1997, up from 60 to 1 in 1990 and 30 to 1 in 1960'.

According to Richard Sennett (1998), these socio-economic changes have corroded character that was once anchored in work and working life. They have disrupted occupations and occupational identities, which were valued for their contribution to self and others. Work practices have fragmented. Some workplace hierarchies have been flattened and de-layered. Job redesign and multiskilling present employees with new tasks but no time to learn. Innovations in employment procedures have increased the number of precarious jobs and deepened the divide in the dual labour market (Watson, 2003).

These changes are evident in the redefinition of education and training as lifelong learning. Older practices of work-related education that helped form occupational identities and provide entry to specific occupational communities have been redesigned. They are replaced by provision that encourages more individualistic and entrepreneurial learning, alongside the acquisition of rather narrow skill sets. Teachers' work and voice has been undercut by the assertion of corporate and managerial imperatives, alongside a significant diversification and de-centering of learning beyond the formal institutions of education and training (Ferguson & Seddon, 2006).

Today occupational practices, and their interfaces with learning, are ambiguous and often lived ambivalently. Sennett argues that this is because, in a short-term world where everything seems fluid and with no definite value, there is little firm anchorage for mutual responsibility, commitment and trust.

Disturbing work and the practical politics of 'we'

These institutional changes create new terms and conditions for (collective) agency that shake employees self-understanding in profound ways. The idea of an occupation as a responsible contributor to society and a way of regulating community is hard to sustain when the image of success is the individual entrepreneur. The imagery of the go-getting, risk taking, mobile individual

engaged in individualised self-management encourages behaviours that are oriented towards free choice and economic advantage, rather than having regard for context, community and cultural norms.

This re-norming of working life repositions occupational identities as individual choosers. They direct their own lives but within an 'illegible regime of power' (Sennett, 1998: 10), where power relations operate through unfamiliar means of control that are hard to read and respond to. These changes eat into the 'sustainable sentiments' that anchor durable traits in our character and define the interface between self and others.

The disturbing experience of having '"No long term" disorients action over the long term, loosens bonds of trust and commitment, and divorces will from behaviour' (Sennett, 1998: 31). With uncertainty woven into the everyday practices of flexible capitalism, the endorsement of the entrepreneur over prior occupational identities is accompanied by occupational disconnection that many people experience as a deep disquiet and can lead to serious isolation and depression.

In these conditions people's sense of disquiet can become a focus for articulating what is happening in the interests of self-survival. People come together to speak 'out of inner need' in what can become a transforming politics (Sennett, 1998: 148). Individuals look for ways of re-anchoring identity, their sense of self and other, through various kinds of self-work (Chappell *et al,* 2003). This can be an individual project that re-stories self and others in more productive ways (Pardy, 2008). It can also appear as collective coalescings around projects that give purpose, find common pleasures and mobilise memories to rebuild connectedness (Seddon, Henriksson and Niemeyer, 2008).

Boundary work is fundamental to this transforming politics. Occupations, like individuals, construct boundaries as a way of delineating self from other. This is often not an explicit process but a consequence of people working together, developing particular normative ways of seeing and acting in the world. When people say 'we', it is an indication that some kind of collective identity is being fabricated. 'We' defines a territory and a set of cultural practices that delineate 'we' from 'them'.

Social structures and cultural traditions contribute to this boundary work in two ways. First, they provide social and cultural resources that can be mobilised discursively in the process of staking out a territory that distinguishes groups and define boundary markers. They also shape the way boundaries operate as closed barriers or more open boundary zones across which things flow and can be transacted. This boundary permeability is linked to the terms and conditions of self-work. For instance, scarcity of resources can encourage strong boundary definition as identities hold on to what they have got and repel those who seek

to cross boundaries. Policy endorsement of joined-up working can encourage more open relationships, interactions and exchanges, as long as there is resource security for the agencies involved.

There is evidence that the policy settings in VET since the 1990s have contributed to fragmentation of the VET teaching occupation and dispersed its expertise. Yet there are also indications of growing counter-movements that consolidate and sometimes renegotiate occupational boundaries. The training market drives some of this boundary work because when users choose the training in which they will invest their resources, it is incumbent on providers to project messages about what they offer. Yet alongside this kind of simple marketing activity, VET occupational groups are engaging in much more fundamental identity work. These projects and activities actively fabricate coalescings, clusters and networks that re-anchor occupational identities and protect, renew and pass on occupational expertise.

Disturbing and transforming Australian VET

Disturbing VET

VET has been in the vanguard of economic rationalist reform in Australia since the 1980s. Initially award restructuring focused on education and training as a means to prepare internationally competitive workforces with career paths to motivate learning. Industrial constraints shifted the focus in the late 1980s towards stand alone training reform. In this process publicly funded TAFE systems were pressed to become part of VET; an open training market comprising training enterprises that operate within purchaser-provider relations with industry and government.

These reforms have made fundamental changes to practices of work-related learning. There was a shift to market coordination and increased commercial project-based work. The nomenclature of 'TAFE' was disendorsed. Public education provision was reordered as industry-led VET aligned to industry priorities. Responsiveness to user-choices became a feature of this market that trades qualifications as proxies for skill. There was growth in international education export and growing numbers of on-shore international students. Access increased for Australian students too, especially for learners who did not fit or choose learning framed within school-university norms. Competency-based training and assessment was generalized across all occupational learning, which fragmented prior curriculum practices that were anchored in contextualized and holistic occupational knowledge practices. As the reach of VET expanded, there was growing recognition of applied learning and its validity in supporting productive learning cultures across sectoral boundaries.

These reforms have changed the scope and character of VET by redrawing sectoral boundaries in relation to service delivery and decision-making. For

many learners, access to education and training has increased. For VET these changes represent an expanding role and increased legitimacy in line with industry and government's economic and social development priorities. For other agencies and providers, it can be an opportunity to get particular learners or stakeholders off their backs and permit more focused business development agenda. The decision-making boundaries were redrawn early with the construction of VET as a 'industry-led' system. It began as a corporatist agenda involving employers and unions but became increasingly employer-led system.

Re-norming VET teaching

All these changes expanded demands and expectations of the 'VET workforce' and led to the re-norming of VET teaching. It meant that occupational identity, expertise and renewal confronted changing terms and conditions at work. This was compounded by a disregard of the special occupational expertise that teachers and managers brought to the work of vocational, applied and second-chance learning.

Changing conditions of work redesigned employment and work practices within VET. Funding constraints, market pressures around price of training, and efficiency dividends were used to justify changes in employment conditions and reduced training requirements for teachers who work in VET. These pressures were felt most acutely in TAFE Institutes and large community providers. In these organizations, a history of public investment in infrastructure and workforce development created large organizations offering diverse programs taught largely by qualified staff. It meant their running costs were high but there was little scope to signal the quality of their teaching, or learning supports, in a market that operated mostly on price signals.

Alongside these changes were new rules about teaching qualifications in VET. The requirement that VET teachers should have a Certificate IV level teaching qualification undercut earlier expectations that were anchored in historic public investments in TAFE systems. Until the early 1990s in Victoria, TAFE teachers were industry experts who entered teaching and then studied for a Diploma-level teaching qualification on a time-release basis. Today, while there are variations between states (eg. Victoria requires level 5 qualification for salary progression), the national norm is defined by a competency-based training in 'training and assessment'. It means that any higher qualifications are an optional extra – and an optional extra cost, that is increasingly born by the individual employee rather than by the employer.

These reform outcomes have institutionalised the 'industry trainer' as the normative model of 'teaching' in VET. While this outcome may be logical in an 'industry-led' system, it fails to recognise the specialist expertise that teachers

bring to their work with learners (young and old), and the social significance and legitimacy of this kind of work as a contribution to Australia's economic and social future.

The effect of these developments is to project public signals that VET teaching is not professional-level work (which is commonly associated with degree-level qualifications). They do nothing to counter the established public understanding of the status hierarchy between VET and universities (which also do not require a teaching qualification). Unlike schools and, increasingly, early childhood education, where the job of teaching is used to justify a degree-level qualification, VET downplays the importance of teaching expertise in the development of distinctive learning cultures in VET. Unlike those sectors, in VET an industry trainer can be trained to just over a Year 12 equivalent level and this is sufficient to support the large numbers of Australians who learn through VET (See Table 1).

Table 1: Participation in Australian education and training

Schools	3.4 million students
Universities	<1 million students
VET	1.7 million learners in formal VET 5.9 million people in work-related training courses 600,000 learners in ACE

Source: ABS, 2008

While this message may be acceptable for employers seeking to keep costs down, there are longer-term costs. These costs ultimately become visible through their effects in terms of larger collective capacities: for industries, their skill and competence profiles, and capacities to recruit staff; and for Australia and its capacity to compete internationally in terms of workforce productivity and innovation. These kinds of workforce constraints are already evident in VET. Skills shortages, plus an aging VET workforce with limited recruitment in younger age groups, suggests that managed reform and diversification of the VET sector to meet multiple and conflicting needs and expectations have had effects that are not entirely effective nor attractive to potential recruits.

Innovation and boundary work

Managed VET reforms disturbed teaching work but also prompted problem-solving and occupational agency. These occupational responses to system change have driven the practical politics of work ever since. Some of these practical politics are oriented to defending past practices and reconsolidating familiar occupational identities and boundaries. Others are finding new ways of negotiating the present.

Since the early 1990s, I have documented these processes of disturbing and transforming work in VET, and their effects in generating innovative practices. Let me provide some examples.

Studies in both public and private VET providers show that some organisational units supported their staff to navigate through policy changes. They built innovative relationships with clients and colleagues, supported development of employee's working knowledge, and created coordination mechanisms to support new ways of doing teaching and learning. Teachers described the way these changes turned the department into a business, yet they found morally defensible ways of working productively in this environment while continuing to address and support student learning needs (Seddon, 2000). One TAFE Associate Director talked about these developments as 'doing business with an educator's heart'. Equally, there were Institutes where them-us divisions were mobilised in politics that defended the status quo and cut off innovative developments by people who didn't fit the mainstream norms and were seen as not like 'we' (Seddon, 2001).

Breathing Life into Training (Sefton, Waterhouse, & Deakin, 1994) describes an innovative industry training program. It supported learning amongst shopfloor workers by endorsing their working knowledge as a means of developing their literacy, numeracy and self-confidence. The training led to competency-based qualifications but was taught through a process of grouping competency standards into larger knowledge-skill mixes. These competency clusters were described as 'holistic competence' necessary to do the job and secure occupational identity. The authors emphasise that building the capacity of workers depended upon a mindset that rejected deficit models of learners and, instead, worked with the learner's 'strengths, abilities, attributes and workplace competencies of workers' (p.19).

This approach to training made significant demands on teacher's pedagogical capacities. As the authors note (pp 324-5), such 'integrated training' means working in mixed teams, including teachers, trainers and stakeholders, to develop 'sophisticated understandings and strategies which support workplace learning and change processes'. They express concern that 'training for many workplace trainers goes little further than presentation skills on the assumption that this is all that is required to deliver pre-packaged modules'. They stress the need for professional development, which supports critical and collaborative curriculum development in partnership 'with the stakeholders who stand to benefit from the program'. Equally, there were challenges for workplace teachers. The integrated mode of training requires teacher to become experts in 'applied adult education'. It means that teachers need to relinquish a comfortable place teaching their particular discipline, to 'explore how their expertise may apply within the context of the workplace'. What counts is 'the teacher's capacity to see how his or her particular understandings and expertise

may be used to support effective workplace learning and change' (Sefton *et al*, 1994: 324; Waterhouse and Sefton, 1997).

Research on social partnerships reveals the challenges of coordination in capacity-building (Department of Education and Training, 2002; Seddon & Billett, 2004; Seddon et al., 2008). Partnership initiatives bring stakeholders and applied adult educators together to support learning, particularly amongst young people at risk of social inclusion. Cultural work is a key feature of effective partnerships. It includes sensitivity to cultural differences and also capacities to work through these differences by acknowledging, respecting and trust-building, rather than through blurring differences. These processes require the deployment of interpersonal and organisational practices to structure, recognise and endorse identities. Carefully managed relationships enable transactions that support knowledge and resource sharing across cultural boundaries. This boundary-work requires more than cultural understanding. It requires a sharp sense of the way knowledge and power are co-produced and enacted through cultural/organisational practices and an awareness of the importance of structures, clear agreements and transparent processes in navigating through difference to agreements

Professional education is another site for building the capacities of the VET workforce. For example, since the late 1990s, Monash has offered specialist Bachelor (since 1998) and Masters programs (since 2003) in applied adult education. These programs are offered in partnership with those who benefit - the employers (TAFE and industry) and the individuals who enrol as students. Our aim in these programs is to create a knowledge-sharing environment. This learning space supports networking, good relationships and builds capacities for big picture and strategic thinking, critical analysis, evidence-based inquiry and reflective engagement in global-local changes in work and education. We actively build academic capacities in learning, researching and critical questioning, but we use activity-based teaching strategies that support people as they develop their confidence in thinking work. Focusing on the relationship between university perspectives and their own everyday working lives provides a powerful medium for building capacities for innovation that are anchored in reflective questioning. These programs have been successful, maintaining individual enrolments from people working in small business, corporates, community providers and TAFE Institutes, and getting repeat business from employers who contract us as part of their workforce development agenda.

Since 2005, I have been working in an EU funded cross-national partnership with European colleagues in the field of lifelong learning and work (CROSSLIFE, 2009). Our university partnership (Monash, Tampere (Finland), London Institute of Education, Malta, Zurich and Copenhagen) has developed a framework for designing, implementing and evaluating an experimental program for VET professionals enrolled in research Masters and Doctoral programs. The

program brings these students together in 3 cross-national workshops to learn, research and work together on topics related to the globalisation of work and education. I was able to support six Australian student/professionals to attend the London and Finland workshops using EU and Monash funding. They have each endorsed the value of the workshops and their 'travelling pedagogies', and their opportunities to build networks with tertiary education professionals from other countries. However, it has been difficult to access funding to support this initiative or student's participation in the three workshops.

Sustaining innovation

Reflecting across these cases, two lessons stand out.

Firstly, it seems that innovations in VET are sustained where occupational identities and cultural norms remain well anchored and clear. These identities are a resource both for those who embody them and for those who engage with them. Relationships can be built, and formalised agreements and processes of institutionalisation negotiated, between identities that are parties to the initiative. Negotiation is difficult when identities are blurred.

Conditions of sustainable innovation build on defined and anchored identities in ways that:

- Recognise and address new skill demands and job families within the world of work by identifying learning needs that can be taken up by teachers and managers in VET. This cross-border work develops through horizontal relations between communities of practice who are proud of their work and its contribution to problem-solving and the common good.

- Consolidate occupational identity by recognising and endorsing this specialist expertise. These processes translate private individual skills into publicly acknowledged resources and quality signals that can be used, and communicated to others, in and beyond VET. This public profiling of good practice in addressing learner and client needs helps to justify claims about the significance of teaching expertise and the need to resource its sustainability.

- Coordinate activities effectively by knitting new learning challenges and the deployment of relevant expertise-identities together. It also involves boundary-work that profiles the innovation in ways that build vertical relations to those in positions of power so that the glamour and/or economic benefits of innovation can be traded for resources, recognition and legitimacy.

Secondly, these innovations are mostly modest in scale and sustainability, despite their contribution to good learning outcomes and user-satisfaction. They are very vulnerable to funds running out, capable staff being promoted or retiring, or enthusiasm getting ground down by working against the grain of a workplace.

It seems that the terms and conditions that sustain identity politics and boundary work becomes more exclusive, and ultimately more toxic, as resources constraints cut home. In these circumstances boundaries are mobilised to protect and defend 'we's. But it is only some 'we's that matter. 'We's are judged in relation to endorsed power relations by those who are authorised through the vertical organisational relations tied to the employment contract.

Disturbing work fuels uncertainty amongst employees that creates openings for rethinking occupational practices, identities, and the norms that anchor good practices. These conditions encourage innovation, along with an intensification of work and emotional labour. But this innovation comes up against established power relations. Anchored in formal structures, and privileged cultural norms and identities, these power relations underpin and constitute the established order. This order, its routines and taken-for-granted assumptions, tends to just roll on in the old ways. This is not always an intended outcome, but often just a matter of institutional inertia, although it is a visionary leader who will commit funds to an initiative when routine work is under pressure.

Managerialism drives a wedge into the teaching division of labour. The endorsement of managerial prerogative privileges vertical organisational authority at the expense of authority relations that are anchored in the authority of expertise. These power relations divide managers who manage and worry about the budget, from teachers who are repositioned as contracted service deliverers according to industry training norms. So the 'we's that matter are those 'we' like – those that do what we want, that respond to official demands and budget pressures, that make us look good relative to others.

Caught in the scissor movement of escalating funding constraints intended to change established practices and the established practices of powerful interests in workplaces, it is innovation that fails. Local problem-solving carried by individuals at their own expense, rather than through institutionalised arrangements, is ultimately repositioned as just another kind of work intensification. Such innovation-failures bolster defensive politics around the *status quo*, rather than steering reform towards more innovative practices through selective recognition and resourcing.

Is this pattern of innovation and its undercutting a feature of global times? Or is it a peculiarly Australian feature of national institutional redesign justified in terms of global imperatives? Lets look briefly to Europe.

VET teaching overseas

In Europe, it seems that countries have woken up to these innovative capacity-building strategies and their dependence on sophisticated knowledge and skills in applied adult education earlier than Australia. Europe mobilises and supports capacity-building as an aspect of soft power (Nye, 2004), rather than rhetorically advocating education and innovation while exercising hard power resource constraints and managerialism as in Australia.

The European Commission affirms the place of lifelong learning in building Europe as an advanced knowledge-based economy. Economic performance is seen not just in terms of preparing workers who learn, but also learning citizens. The 'capacity to function as a democratic, tolerant society requires the active promotion of citizenship and equality of opportunity' (DGEAC, 2006, Seddon, 2007)

Finland stands-out partly because of PISA. Its approach to education and training is distinctive compared to Australia because it does not deny occupational expertise and identity. The Finnish orientation to education prepare learners for working life by building on 'knowledge and creativity plus values such as equity, tolerance, gender equality, responsibility for the environment and internationalisation. Everyone has an equal right to participate in education according to ability and in keeping with the principle of lifelong learning' (Kyrö, 2006: 11).

Excellence and equity is applied to VET as well as school and university education. For instance, pay levels for teachers in vocational schools and polytechnics are higher than teachers in other schools and universities. Entry to teaching in VET as well as general education requires teachers and principals to complete a Masters degree (5 years study). Student teachers are required to develop knowledge of teaching and learning that can be generalised to all forms of education and training (p. 46). This means that teachers working in VET have a broad knowledge of education across education contexts, have expertise in adult education, and are trained in researching as well as teaching. Qualifications maintain a clear occupational distinction between adult educators and industry trainers. The teaching workforce is regulated, while trainers in apprenticeships and industry trainers are deregulated.

This pattern of endorsing the expertise and identity of the teaching occupation is also evident in countries with Anglo-Saxon rather than Germanic education traditions. The Malta College of Applied Science and Technology (MCAST) requires its teachers to complete a 2 year Diploma level qualification, the BTEC Certificate in Further Education Teaching, double-badged by BTEC and MAST. The Handbook developed by the Professional Development Centre within MCAST emphasises developing 'an educational foundation for a career in

teaching in FE and adult education', which makes an 'indirect but significant contribution to the nature of employment within the Maltese industry'. This requires skills in 'informed judgements', 'confident, autonomous decision-makers' and 'analytical and evaluative skills as well as their critical awareness of educational practice' (MCAST, 2007: 7).

Even in the UK, 2007 regulations now govern the training and registration of learning and skills teachers who work in further education colleges, universities and other lifelong learning settings. These regulations require teacher registration with the Institute for Learning to access qualified or associate licensed practitioner status. The license to teach depends upon Diploma-level qualifications and professional formation activities that ensure that teachers are up to date in their professional learning and able to apply that learning in professional activities (LLUK, 2008).

These trends are also endorsed beyond Europe. The Hangzhou Declaration (2004) was signed at a UNESCO International Meeting on Innovation and Excellence in TVET Teacher/Trainer Education. This declaration, agreed by participants from 25 countries, argues for Masters-level degrees in Teacher and Trainer Education.

Across Europe, innovation and internationalisation are actively encouraged and supported through mobility programs for students and staff across education and training. They are funded through programs, like Erasmus and Grundvig, that bring professionals and researchers to work, learn and research together across national boundaries. This travelling pedagogy has been made available to existing employees and to young people just entering careers. The European Masters in Lifelong Learning (2008) brings young people from around the world to Europe to learn about lifelong learning and work. In the process, students work together, enrich their capacities for cross-cultural collaboration and its applications in innovative teaching. Meanwhile, Europe accesses a cohort of adventurous young people who, after two years, have become familiar with Europe, well networked, and enthusiastic about lifelong learning as a future career.

Addressing the productive challenge with a ready-made but invisible resource

This paper has argued that VET reforms have driven organisational and cultural change in post-school, work-related adult learning. Yet information asymmetries between policy and practice are creating coordination failures that threaten the contribution that VET makes to productivity. In particular, the renewal of occupational expertise in VET has been hollowed out by the failure to recognise the 'teaching' expertise required to build capacities for innovation.

Other countries have not followed our path. They have, instead, recognized the contribution that teaching expertise and occupational identity make to building a successful knowledge economy with social inclusion. Those countries acknowledge and endorse their teaching workforces, recognize their expertise in applied adult education and support its renewal. They have intelligently targeted funds for early career and professional development programs that take advantage of the traveling pedagogies that are now possible in a globally interconnected and technologically mediated world. They are harnessing the occupation's passion, mobilizing occupational commitments to building human capacities, preparing the occupation as learning workers who are also learning citizens, and enabling them to make contributions to national economic and social development. And in this process, they are creating careers in teaching that are attractive to young people.

The challenge for government is to address these coordination failures. It requires urgent attention to the sustainability of teaching expertise in Australian VET and the organization of information flows that will address the information asymmetry between VET policy and practice.

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